

percent of the new parliament will consist of women. The women are guaranteed equal rights in the constitution, equal rights between men and women. It is a very, very positive statement. Here is another: "Iraqi Women Groups Take to the Streets."

Iraqi women representing 55 women groups and organizations from all over Iraq gathered at Fardus Square this morning to sign a petition against resolution 137 to demand equal rights and fair, unbiased representation, at least 40 percent, in the future Iraqi transitional council, governorate and municipal councils. Forty percent. They are not satisfied with what they got in Afghanistan with 25. They want at least 40 percent.

The sit-in was organized by the Supreme Council of Iraqi Women, the Advisory Committee for Women Affairs, and the Iraqi Women Network. Other noted women groups were present such as the Iraqi Contemporary Women Movement, Organization for Women Freedom in Iraq, Iraqi Hope Association, Independent Women Organization, Women's Union of Kurdistan, Kurdistan Free Women Movement, Iraqi Women Revival Organization, and the Iraqi Students and Youth Union. Over 55 different groups. Think of it, in a very short period of time, the number of organizations that are forming and learning how to participate in representative government. They will make mistakes, but they are going through a very constructive process. They are learning how to express their voice in a meaningful way that they have not had the opportunity to do.

Several women activists gave speeches. Planning Minister Dr. Mahdi Al-Hafudh shyly gave a brief word of support and signed the petition. It got interesting when a woman in a burqa showed up at the gathering with her three kids. Remember, this is all on their Internet, the Web pages. Reporters all stormed forward trying to interview her. Her husband was imprisoned for years by the former regime for political reasons, only to be executed in the end and for her to pay for the bullets. A very heart-rending story. She held his death certificate, as you can see in the pictures. She said, we didn't wait all these years without the most basic rights to be denied them now. An Arab reporter asked her if she was Sunni or Shiite.

□ 1615

Her quote: "'I'm neither,' she snapped at him. 'I'm an Iraqi citizen first and foremost, and I refuse to be asked such a question.'

"AYS, and I, skulked around Fardus square and took pictures. Omar joined us later. We signed the petition against Resolution 137 and the woman offered us a rose. If you want to sign it, there is an on-line petition which you can find at this site. Equality in Iraq. The petitions are to be submitted to Paul Bremer, and Kofi Annan later this week. Bremer has made it known that

he will veto any law that will not recognize basic civil freedoms, but Resolution 137 is yet to be vetoed.

"You can find pictures of the gathering" as well.

Communication and representative government and participation is alive and well, as the other e-mail indicated and closed, "Behold, one little beautiful flower of new Mesopotamian nationalism blossoms. More will follow." Let us hope and pray that that is exactly what will happen in Iraq. There is a tremendous amount of work that has been accomplished in Iraq. There is a tremendous amount of work that has been accomplished in Afghanistan. There is a tremendous amount of work that needs to still occur for those flowers, additional blossoms, to bloom. But that is what we are working for so that these folks can have a representative government, a new and free Iraq and a new and free Afghanistan.

THE DISPARITIES IN WEALTH AND INCOME

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BISHOP of Utah). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 2003, the gentleman from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. Speaker, as the only Independent in the House of Representatives, my views are a little bit different than many of my Democratic and Republican colleagues. So I want to share some thoughts today, thoughts that are not necessarily often expressed here on the floor of the House or often expressed, unfortunately, in our corporately controlled media. Also I would like to mention to Members of the House that if they need any further information on any of the issues that we are going to be discussing they can get it from our Web site which is www.Bernie.house.gov.

Mr. Speaker, the corporate media does not talk about it terribly much, and we do not talk about it terribly often here on the floor of the House, but the United States of America is rapidly becoming three separate nations. We are becoming a Nation which has an increasingly wealthy elite composed of a small number of people with incredible wealth and power. That is one part of our Nation. The other part of our Nation is a middle class, the vast majority of our people, and that part of our society is shrinking. Middle class is shrinking. The average worker in America is working longer hours for lower wages. And the third part of our society, the low-income people, what we are seeing is a substantial increase in poverty, and we are seeing millions and millions of the poorest people in this country struggling hard just to keep their heads above water. One America incredibly rich, another America working longer hours for low wages, another America struggling hard to make ends meet.

Mr. Speaker, there has always been a wealthy elite in this country. That is

not new. And there has always been a gap between the rich and the poor. But the disparities in wealth and income that currently exist in this country today have not been seen since the 1920s. In other words, instead of becoming a more egalitarian Nation with a growing middle class, we are becoming a Nation with by far the most unequal distribution of wealth and income in the entire industrialized world. It is not England with its royalty. It is the United States of America which has the most unequal distribution of wealth and income of major countries.

Today, the wealthiest 1 percent of Americans own more wealth than the bottom 95 percent. The wealthiest 1 percent, yes, that is right, the wealthiest 1 percent own more wealth than the bottom 95 percent. The CEOs of our largest corporations now earn 500 times what their workers are making, while their employees are being squeezed, being forced to pay more for their health insurance, while pensions are being cut back for workers, while retiree benefits are being cut.

The CEOs of large corporations are making out like bandits. And I am not just talking about the crooks who ran Enron or WorldCom or Arthur Andersen. I am talking about the highly respected CEOs like the retired former head of General Electric, Jack Welch, who, when he retired in 2000, he received \$123 million in compensation and a \$10-million-a-year pension benefit for his lifetime, and meanwhile he cut back on the jobs that GE had in America and shipped substantial amounts of those jobs over to China and Mexico. But he did take good care of his own needs.

And I am talking about Lou Gerstner of IBM. He is the former head of IBM, who, from 1997 to 2002, received \$366 million in compensation while slashing the pension benefits of his employees.

I am talking about people like C.A. Heimbold, Jr. of Bristol-Myers Squibb, who received almost \$75 million in 2001 while helping to make it almost impossible for many seniors in our country to afford the outrageously high cost of prescription drugs.

Mr. Speaker, we do not talk about this issue enough, but we should, and that is that today the Nation's 13,000 wealthiest families, who constitute 1/100 of 1 percent of the population, a tiny, tiny percentage of Americans, receive almost as much income as the bottom 20 million families in the United States of America; 1/100 of 1 percent receive as much income as the bottom 20 million families. And I defy anyone to tell me that that is in any way fair or that is in any way what the United States is supposed to be.

New data from the Congressional Budget Office, the CBO, shows that the gap between the rich and the poor in terms of income more than doubled from 1979 to the year 2000. In other words, we are moving in exactly the wrong direction. The gap is such that the wealthiest 1 percent had more

money to spend after taxes than the bottom 40 percent.

Mr. Speaker, according to data from the CBO, between 1973 and 2000, the average real inflation-accounted-for income of the bottom 90 percent of American taxpayers actually declined by 7 percent, the average worker seeing a decline. Meanwhile, the income of the top 1 percent rose by 148 percent. The income of the top 1/10 of 1 percent rose by 343 percent, and the income of the top 1/100 of 1 percent rose by 599 percent.

I know I am throwing out a lot of figures, and I suspect that I am boring some people, but the important point to be made here is the middle class is shrinking, and the people at the very top are doing extraordinarily well.

Mr. Speaker, when I was growing up, the expectation was that for someone in the middle class, that person in that family would be working 40 hours a week and would earn enough money to take care of the needs of a family. One person, 40 hours a week, earning enough money to take care of the whole family. I think, Mr. Speaker, we can all agree that that is no longer the reality for very many families in this country. What has happened is, because of the shrinking of the middle class, the decline in real wages, it is very rare indeed in my State of Vermont or in any State in this country that we see a situation in which both people in a marriage are not now forced to work, leaving kids at home or in child care.

In terms of what is happening to the middle class, we have lost over 3 million private sector jobs in the last 3 years, and with over 8 million workers unemployed, the unemployment rate today is at 5.4 percent. But I think we all know that that unemployment, the official unemployment statistic, very much understates the reality facing workers in America. Today if one is living in a high unemployment area, and if they have given up looking for work, they are not a statistic. If they are working part time and want to work full time, but there are no full-time jobs available, they are not a statistic. So the reality is that real unemployment is substantially higher than official statistics indicate.

In addition, of course, there are millions of Americans today with a college degree or higher education degrees who are working at jobs that require far less education than their abilities would provide.

Mr. Speaker, here is a point that I want to spend a little bit of time on: Importantly, over the last 3 years, of the 3.3 million private sector jobs that have been lost, over 2.8 million of those jobs were in the manufacturing sector. And one of the reasons for that is that we have a disastrous trade policy which almost tells corporate America, leave the United States of America, go to China, go to Mexico, go to some disparate Third World country where people are paid pennies an hour. That is what we want them to do.

The reality is that NAFTA has failed, our membership in the World Trade Or-

ganization has failed, and perhaps, above all, permanent normal trade relations with China has failed.

Mr. Speaker, the time is now, and it is long overdue for the United States Congress to stand up to corporate America, to stand up to the President of the United States, to stand up to the editorial writers all over this country who year after year after year have told us how wonderful unfettered free trade is, how many new jobs would be created. The results are in. They are wrong. Unfettered free trade has been a disaster for working Americans. It has been a disaster for the middle class. And it is high time we understood that. It is high time we ended our disastrous trade policies and begin to negotiate trade policies that work not just for corporate America, not just for CEOs who make huge compensation packages, but trade policies that are fair for the working people of this country.

Mr. Speaker, one of the issues that is not talked about enough, is not talked about enough, is a very simple question, and the question is this: If in the last 20 or 30 years we have seen an explosion of technology, if we have seen the development of sophisticated computers, we have seen the development of e-mail, we have seen faxes, we have seen cell phones, we have seen satellite communications, we have seen robotics in factories, we are a Nation which has experienced a huge increase in productivity.

□ 1630

My question is, if the average worker today is far more productive than he or she was 20 years ago, why is that worker not working shorter hours and earning more money, rather than, in fact, working longer hours and earning less money? Why is it that in 1973 the average American worker in inflation-accounted-for wages made \$14.09 an hour, while in 1998 he or she made only \$12.77 an hour? There is something wrong when productivity is exploding and workers are earning less in real wages.

In terms of manufacturing, we have, unbelievably but true, we have in the last 3 years lost 16 percent, 16 percent, of the jobs in our manufacturing sector. At 14.3 million jobs, we are at the lowest number of factory jobs since 1950, since 1950. In my own State of Vermont, one of the smallest States in this country, we have lost some 9,300 manufacturing jobs since 2001. And here is the tragedy: We are not, when we lose manufacturing jobs, just losing jobs; we are losing good-paying jobs. In Vermont, for example, on average, someone working in manufacturing makes over \$42,000 a year. That is a decent income. And when that employee loses his or her job, in almost every instance the new job that is acquired pays less than the job that has been lost and provides lower benefits.

So when we look at the economy, as important as it is to look at the rate of unemployment, it is equally important to look at the jobs that are being lost

and what they paid and the new jobs that are being created and what they pay.

In that regard, a recent study by the Economic Policy Institute showed that in 48 out of our 50 States, more good-paying jobs were lost than were created. Nationally what they discovered is that new jobs created paid 21 percent less than the jobs that were being lost. We are losing decent-paying manufacturing jobs, good benefits; we are growing low-wage service industry jobs, poor benefits. In my State of Vermont, those numbers are higher. The new jobs being created are 29 percent less than the jobs we are losing.

Now, when we talk about the economy, the \$64 question on everybody's mind should be, what is going on for the future? What is going on for the future? Will the new jobs that are being created for our kids and our grandchildren be challenging jobs, be important jobs, be jobs that provide them with a middle-class standard of living? Those are the questions that parents are asking all over America; what kind of jobs will be available for our kids or our grandchildren?

Every 2 years the Bureau of Labor Statistics does a study, and what their study is about is to project and to study what new jobs will be created in largest numbers over the next 10 years. They just completed a study covering the years 2002 to 2012. In other words, the question is, in what occupations are we going to see the most job growth, and what occupations will we see the least job growth?

Let me quote from Business Week as to what the results of that study showed: "According to a forecast released February 11 by the Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, a large share of new jobs will be in occupations that do not require a lot of education and pay below average." Pay below average. That is what is being projected in terms of new jobs for our kids.

Think for a moment. All of this technology, all of this emphasis on education, and the new jobs that are going to be created pay below average. Of the 10 occupations that are expected to grow the most, only 2 would require a bachelor's degree; 1 of those 10 jobs requires an associate degree, 7 require a high school degree.

So the conclusion there, the reality there, is that many of the new jobs being created for the future are waiters jobs and waitresses jobs, food preparation jobs, customer service representatives, jobs that require on-the-job training, jobs that do not require a college education and jobs that are low wage.

In other words, Mr. Speaker, it tells us that a profound lie is being perpetrated on the American people. It tells us that unless we change our public policies very quickly, the middle class will continue to shrink, and the jobs being created for the coming generations will, by and large, be low-wage, unskilled work. That is not the

America that I want to see for our kids or grandchildren, nor do I think that is the America that most Americans want to see.

Now, Mr. Speaker, when we talk about the decline of manufacturing, when we talk about the loss of decent-paying jobs to China and other countries, let us understand that this year alone the United States has had a \$500 billion record-breaking trade deficit, \$500 billion more in goods and services than we are sending out.

In 2003, the trade deficit with China alone, one country, was \$120 billion, and that number is projected to increase in future years. In fact, the National Association of Manufacturers estimates that if present trends continue, our trade deficit with China will grow to \$330 billion in 5 years. I hope those Members of Congress who told us how great most favored nation status with China would be, how great permanent normal trade relations would be, hear those numbers. \$120 billion trade deficit today. The expectation is that in 5 years that number will be \$330 billion.

Mr. Speaker, our disastrous trade policy is not only costing us millions of decent-paying jobs, it is squeezing wages. It is squeezing wages, because companies have now the opportunity to easily go to Mexico or to China. They are putting the squeeze on American workers, and they are saying if you do not take cuts in wages, if you do not put more into your own health care package out of your own pocket, we are going to be going.

This trend of wage squeezing is most apparent and most dramatic among people who only have a high school diploma who are now going out into the labor market. They are seeing a huge decline in wages today compared to what the case was 20 years ago, and the reason for that is obvious; 20 or 30 years ago there were factory jobs available that enabled high school graduates to earn a middle-class standard of living. Today those jobs are gone, and they are only available at McDonald's, at Wal-Mart, and people cannot make it on those wages.

I think, Mr. Speaker, if I were to summarize what is happening in our economy today, I think the easiest way to do it would be to point out that not so many years ago General Motors was the largest employer in America. General Motors, with a strong union, paid its workers and pays its workers today a living wage, good wages, good benefits.

But today, Mr. Speaker, the largest employer in the United States of America is Wal-Mart, not General Motors. That is the transition, from a GM economy of good wages, to a Wal-Mart economy of poverty wages. Today Wal-Mart employees earn \$8.23 an hour, or \$13,861 annually, wages which are below the poverty level. That is what is going on in the American economy. Our largest employer now pays workers wages that are below the poverty level.

Ironically, and pathetically, many of these workers qualify for Federal food stamp programs, which means that Wal-Mart is being directly subsidized by U.S. taxpayers. Wal-Mart, our largest employer, has been sued by 27 States for not paying the overtime pay their workers are entitled to, and some months ago Federal agents raided their headquarters and 60 of their stores across this country, arresting 300 illegal workers in 21 States. That is our largest employer.

A recent study, and this is really incredible and an issue that I intend to move vigorously on, a recent study indicated that for every Wal-Mart Super Store that employed 200 workers, taxpayers were subsidizing these low-paid workers to the tune of \$420,000 per year, which equates to about \$2,100 per employee. Can you believe that? Wal-Mart salaries and benefits are so low that taxpayers throughout this country have got to provide health care benefits and food stamp benefits and housing benefits to supplement the pathetically low wages that Wal-Mart, our largest employer, is providing.

Now, here you add insult to injury, Mr. Speaker. It turns out that while the taxpayers of this country, the middle class of this country, is subsidizing Wal-Mart, 5 out of the 10 wealthiest people in America are in, yes, you got it right, the Walton family, and the widow of Sam Walton as well. So these five people who own Wal-Mart are some of the wealthiest people in America. Each of them is worth about \$20 billion. Five people owning Wal-Mart, \$20 billion apiece, \$100 billion for one family, and, guess what? The middle class of America is subsidizing their employees because they are paying their workers poverty wages.

Now, if that makes sense to somebody, please give my Web site an e-mail. You tell me, www.Bernie.house.gov. If that makes sense to you, you e-mail that to me. That is what the transformation of the American economy is all about, the loss of good-paying jobs, the creation of poverty-wage jobs.

Mr. Speaker, not only has permanent normal trade relations with China been a disaster, but so has NAFTA. We have an increased trade deficit with Mexico. We have lost many, many jobs to Mexico. The irony there is that people might think, well, you know, NAFTA was bad for workers in the United States, but maybe it helped the poor people in Mexico.

Well, think again. Think again. NAFTA has been a disaster for the poor and working people of Mexico. Since 1994, when NAFTA went into existence, the number of people classified as poor or extremely poor has risen from 62 million to 69 million out of a population of 100 million. Since 1994, Mexico's agricultural sector, their rural area, has lost 1.3 million jobs, which is one of the reasons that we are seeing an increase in illegal immigration.

Frankly, Mr. Speaker, it did not take a genius to predict that unfettered free

trade with China would be a disaster, which is why I and many other Members in the House have opposed it from the beginning. When you have disciplined, educated people in China available to work at 20 or 30 cents an hour, and with corporations having the capability of bringing their Chinese-made products back into this country tariff-free, why would American corporations not shut down their plants in this country and run to China?

□ 1645

It did not take a genius, frankly, to anticipate that that would occur.

Now, Mr. Speaker, General Electric is one of the largest corporations in America, and here is what their CEO Jeffrey Immelt had to say about China at a GE investor meeting on December 6, 2002, and I put it up here on this chart. I think it is so important that the American people really should take a strong look at this statement from the leader, from the CEO of one of the largest corporations in America, and here is what he said: "When I am talking to GE managers," GE is a conglomerate, they have many separate companies, "When I am talking to GE managers, I talk China, China, China, China, China. You need to be there." And then he continues: "I am a nut on China. Outsourcing from China is going to grow to \$5 billion. We are building a tech center in China. Every discussion today has to center on China. The cost basis is extremely attractive."

In other words, what Mr. Immelt is saying very directly, and virtually every other corporate head is saying, maybe not quite as overtly, is we are packing up, folks, and we are leaving. Why should we pay American workers 15 or 20 bucks an hour? Why should we allow unions to be formed? Why should we obey environmental regulations when we can go to China and have a workforce in which if workers there try to form a union, they go to jail. If they speak up for democratic rights, they go to jail. If they want environmental protection or worker safety, they go to jail. What a fantastic place for Mr. Immelt and his other CEO friends to move to, and that is precisely what they are doing. They are selling out the working people of this country; they are selling out this country entirely.

Should anybody be surprised that Motorola eliminated almost 43,000 American jobs in 2001 while investing over \$3 billion in China, or that it plans to invest \$10 billion there by the year 2006? Think about your State. Think about your community. Is Motorola building a new factory there? No, they are not. They are off in China.

Who would be shocked that General Electric has thrown hundreds of thousands of American workers out on the street while investing \$1.5 billion in China? From 1975 to 1995, GE eliminated 269,000 jobs; and on and on it goes.

IBM signed deals to train 100,000 software specialists in China over 3 years.

Honeywell is moving rapidly to China. Should anyone be surprised that they have built 13 factories in China, or that Ethan Allen furniture has cut jobs at saw mills in America and 17 manufacturing plants, including the State of Vermont, as they move furniture manufacturing to China? And recently, Mr. Speaker, and this is very alarming, very alarming news, General Motors, one of the largest corporations in America, they have announced that they will be investing billions of dollars in China in order to build and manufacture automobile parts. Will this be the beginning of the end of the automobile industry? Will the automobile industry follow so many of the other industries as it shrinks and shrinks, and as our jobs go abroad, good-paying jobs?

Mr. Speaker, as I think many Americans know, just several weeks ago, the chairman of the President's Economic Council, President Bush's economic adviser made the outrageous statement that outsourcing in the long run is good for the United States. Outsourcing is good for the United States. And their report suggested that if products can be built cheaper in other countries, why, that is where they should be manufactured. What a disgrace. So workers who are making today 15 or 20 bucks an hour, well, yes, the products that they manufacture are going to be costing more to produce than when they are made in China by workers making 20 cents an hour. And the President's chief economic adviser says, well, that is where they should be manufactured. I think that is beyond comprehension.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as bad and as frightening and as disastrous as the decline of manufacturing is in the United States, there is another trend which is taking place which might even be more frightening. Now, over the years, from the first President Bush to President Clinton to this President Bush, from corporate America, from newspaper editorials, from defenders of our trade policy here on the floor of the House, what they told us is they said, well, yes, in free trade, unfettered free trade, there are winners and there are losers. Yes, we might lose some of those blue collar factory jobs; but do not worry, America, because while we lose those blue collar factory jobs, we are going to be creating new white collar information technology jobs that pay people much higher wages than those blue collar jobs that we are losing. That is what they told us.

Unfortunately, as the American people are beginning to learn big time, the advocates of unfettered free trade are wrong again. We now know that blue collar manufacturing jobs are not the only casualty of unfettered free trade. We now know that we are going to see and are seeing the loss of hundreds and hundreds of thousands of good-paying white-collar information technology jobs, many of them going to India and other countries.

According to Forrester Research, a major consultant on this issue, they said, "Over the next 15 years, 3.3 million U.S. service industry jobs, \$136 billion in wages, will move offshore." The information technology industry will lead the initial overseas exodus. Among many other companies moving high-tech jobs abroad is Microsoft, which is spending \$750 million over the next 3 years on research and development on outsourcing in China.

Recently, Intel Corporation chairman Andy Grove warned that the U.S. could lose the bulk of its information technology jobs to overseas competitors in the next decade, largely to India and China. In other words, Mr. Speaker, not only has our unfettered free trade cost us much of our textile industry, our footwear industry, our apparel industry, our steel industry, our tool and die industry, our electronics industry, our furniture industry, and many other industries. It is now going to cost us millions of high-tech jobs as well.

Mr. Speaker, just last week, I sat down in my office with eight workers from the State of Vermont who work for National Life Insurance Company, and they told me that their jobs and the jobs of many of their colleagues will soon be going to India, and that in the near future, they will be sitting next to Indian workers and training them on how to do their jobs. And that is what is happening throughout America. Corporate America is selling out not only blue collar workers; they are selling out white collar workers.

According to the University of California at Berkeley Business School, let me quote from a study that came out on October 29, 2003. This is the University of California Berkeley Business School: "A ferocious new wave of outsourcing of white collar jobs is sweeping the United States," according to a study published by the University of California Berkeley researchers who say the trend could leave as many as 14 million service jobs in the United States vulnerable. The study also indicates that jobs remaining in the U.S. could be subject to pressure for lower wages.

And why would that be? Well, here are some comparisons between wages in the U.S. and India where a lot of these high-tech jobs are going. In the U.S., a telephone operator earns \$12.50 an hour; in India, less than a dollar an hour. A payroll clerk in the U.S. averages \$15 an hour, while in India that person makes less than \$2 an hour. So what we are beginning to see, what we are beginning to see in occupations such as medical transcription services, stock market research for financial firms, customer service centers, legal online database research, payroll and other back-office activities, what we are now seeing is those jobs, often good-paying jobs, are also heading out of this country.

Now, Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear on several issues. I am not anti-

Chinese. I am not anti-Indian. I am not a xenophobe. I am an internationalist. I am more than aware that 1 billion people on this planet live on less than a dollar a day, and I think that the United States and the other countries in the industrialized world have a moral obligation to do everything that we can so that children get the education they need in developing countries, people get the health care and the prescription drugs that they need, that the water that people drink around the world is drinkable. That is our moral obligation. But in order to help poor people around the world, we do not have to destroy the middle class of this country. There are other ways to do that. And ironically, many of these neo-liberal-type approaches are being rejected in Latin America and many other countries around the world because they are not working. The IMF approach, the World Bank approach are being rejected in country after country where governments are being forced to cut back on education, health care, and food subsidies. People do not want to see foreign companies coming in, driving out locally owned manufacturing and their locally owned business.

So the issue is not, do we help poor people around the world. We do. But do we do it in ways that do not destroy the middle class in this country, and I think we can.

The bottom line, Mr. Speaker, is we have got to end the race to the bottom. The goal of our economic policy should be to lift up poor people in the world, not lower the standard of living of American workers. And, Mr. Speaker, that is why, among other things, I have introduced legislation which would terminate, end completely, permanent normal trade relations with China. Trade in itself is a good thing, but it is only a good thing when it works for both sides. The New York Yankees do not trade their number one shortstop for a third-string, minor leaguer and say, well, that is just trade. You trade for equal value. And I believe that the United States has got to negotiate trade agreements with China, India, any country on Earth that work for them and work for us, but that are not one-sided, that work only for the CEOs of large corporations and work against the best interests of the middle class in this country.

Mr. Speaker, when we talk about what is happening to the middle class, when we talk about the loss of decent-paying jobs, when we talk about the growing gap between the rich and the poor, we should also mention something that rarely, rarely gets discussed on the floor of this House.

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That is, that the American worker today is now working longer hours than the worker in any other industrialized country. Over the last 30 years, workers in middle-income, married-couple families with children have added an average of 20 weeks at work,

the equivalent of 5 more months. Most of the increase comes from working wives, many more of whom entered the labor market over this period, adding more work, more weeks per year and more hours per year; in fact, middle-income-wise adding close to 500 hours of work per year between 1979 and 2000.

Mr. Speaker, in my State and I believe all over this country, the American people are physically exhausted. They are stressed out because they are working not one job in many instances, but two jobs, occasionally three jobs. According to statistics from the International Labor Organization, the average American last year worked 1,978 hours, up from 1,942 hours in 1990. That is an increase of almost 1 week of work per year. People are working today in order just to earn enough money to pay the bills, and they are becoming exhausted.

Mr. Speaker, I have talked a little bit about what is going on with the middle class and the conversion of our economy from a growing and strengthened middle class, where we did things like manufacture real goods, to a shrinking middle class, where Wal-Mart is now our major employer, but let me now talk about the people who are not even in the middle class, people who are low income. We have got to ask a question about what is happening to the 11 million Americans who are trying to survive on the pathetic minimum wage of \$5.15 an hour which exists here in the Congress.

Now, can one imagine at that time, when the President of the United States and the Republican leadership have provided hundreds of billions of dollars in tax breaks to the wealthiest 1 percent, there has not been one word of discussion about raising the minimum wage to a living wage? Tax breaks for billionaires, but allow millions of low-income workers to try to make ends meet on \$5.15 an hour? What an outrage.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at our national priorities, we have got to recognize the national shame that in America today poverty is increasing, and we have by far the highest rate of childhood poverty of any major country on Earth. We are a Nation that gives tax breaks to billionaires, but we have 3.5 million people who will experience homelessness in this year, 1.3 million of them children. What kind of priorities is that? What kind of priorities do we establish when millions of senior citizens in America today are unable to afford the outrageously high cost of prescription drugs?

What about veterans, men and women who have put their lives on the line defending this country? Those veterans today, if they walk into a VA hospital or clinic, will more likely than not be placed on a waiting list. Tax breaks for billionaires, but we cannot keep our promises to the veterans of this country, many of whom came back from war wounded in body and wounded in soul, and now this Presi-

dent is attempting to raise premiums for our veterans, attempting to raise the cost of prescription drugs for our veterans. What sense of decency is that? What kind of priorities are that when you say, yeah, if you are a millionaire or a billionaire, we give you a tax break, but if you are a veteran who put your life on the line defending this country, sorry, we just do not have enough money to take care of you?

Mr. Speaker, when we talk about the health care crisis in America, obviously it goes well beyond the problems facing our veterans. We have got to be honest and we have got to acknowledge that our health care system today is in a state of crisis, and we have a lot of information on that issue and on prescription drugs on our Web site, which is www.Bernie.house.gov. The reality in terms of health care is that today 43 million Americans have no health insurance at all, and more and more people are underinsured, higher and higher premiums, higher and higher copayments and higher and higher deductibles.

Mr. Speaker, to my mind, the only solution to the growing crisis in health care, the escalating costs, the fact that more and more people are uninsured or underinsured, is for the United States Government to do what every other industrialized country on Earth has done, and that is establish a national health care system which guarantees health care as a right of citizenship to every man, woman and child. It is morally unacceptable that when a worker loses his or her job, that worker can find himself without any health care, and if injury occurs or an accident occurs, that person can go bankrupt paying off the medical bills, see their credit destroyed and, in some cases, never, ever recover financially from those health care bills.

Either health care is a right of all people, or it is not. Either we provide the best health care in the world to the rich, or we say that everybody in America should have health care through a nonprofit, cost-effective, national health care system.

The irony here, Mr. Speaker, is that some people say, well, that is a great idea, good idea, everybody should have health care; we cannot afford it. Wrong. Our system or our nonsystem today is by far the most wasteful and bureaucratic in the entire world. Mr. Speaker, we spend twice as much per person on health care as do the people of any other country on Earth. It is not that we are not spending enough money, it is that this is a system geared toward profit-making for the insurance companies and for the pharmaceutical industry rather than in providing cost-effective quality care to all of our people.

Study after study have shown that if we move toward a single payer national health care program, we can provide good quality health care to every man, woman and child without spending a nickel more than we are cur-

rently spending because we are going to get rid of all of the bureaucracy, and all of the bill collectors, and all of the advertising and all of the CEOs making exorbitant salaries. We are going to put health care dollars into health care.

Some people may say, well, Bernie, you know, good idea, but you are way out of touch with the American people; they like the current system. Wrong. Absolutely wrong. A recent ABC poll indicated that 62 percent of our population said that they would favor a system of universal health care financed by the government, paid for by the taxpayers, as opposed to the employer-based system we now have.

The American people want change. They are tired of this irrational, wasteful, bureaucratic health care system which is causing so much pain in America where elderly people cannot even fill the prescriptions their doctors are making, and President Bush's Medicare proposal is not going to help them; where people today are getting sick, and they cannot walk into a doctor's office because they cannot afford the deductible, and some of those people are dying; where doctors now are telling us that the patients they are seeing are far sicker than used to be the case because people just do not have health insurance.

Mr. Speaker, given the very serious problems facing our country, and especially the middle class, it is appropriate, I think, to ask what President Bush and his administration have done to address some of those problems. What are their priorities? What are they doing to increase wages in America, to expand the middle class, to lower poverty, to make sure that all of our Americans get the health care that they need? I found it ironic that when the President gave his State of the Union Address, he had almost nothing to say about health care, almost nothing at all, and the reason is that he is not doing anything on health care, that he is tied to the insurance companies and the drug companies who make huge contributions for his campaign, for the Republican Party, and, in fact, they are not prepared to address the very serious problems facing the middle class of this country.

Not only has the President and the Republican leadership provided hundreds of billions of dollars in tax breaks for millionaires and billionaires, people who contribute heavily to their campaigns, they are making it now more difficult for workers to join unions and earn higher wages. They have incredibly pushed an agenda which would deny overtime pay to some 8 million Americans. Now at a time when workers are forced to work longer and longer hours, and many of their income depend on that overtime pay, the President wants to deny some 8 million Americans the overtime pay that they are getting today.

Interestingly enough, we are seeing some bipartisan concern about the rapidly escalating deficit, which this year

will be over \$500 billion, and our national debt, which is now at \$7 trillion. Some of you may have heard the other day that Alan Greenspan, the Chairman of the Fed, he has a response to this growing deficit. Greenspan, who supported hundreds of billions of dollars in tax breaks for the wealthiest people, who supported the President's tax proposal, which in a decade will cost us \$1 trillion, he has a solution to the problem. His solution is let us cut Social Security, let us cut Medicare. In other words, tax breaks for billionaires, run up a deficit, and then you deal with the deficit crisis by cutting back on the cost-of-living increases for our seniors in Social Security and in Medicare and making the retirement age when people receive Social Security later and later. I think that is an outrage.

That is why I have asked the President, who appointed Mr. Greenspan to his position, that is why I have asked the President to fire Mr. Greenspan. You do not support policies which give huge tax breaks to the rich, run up the deficit and then tell the elderly and the sick that they are the ones who will have to balance the budget.

We should be very, very clear that these tax breaks, not only are they, in my view, immoral in terms of providing scant resources to people who do not need them, while we have children sleeping out on the street, but, in fact, what they are doing is leaving a terrible legacy for our children and our grandchildren. Think for a moment about the morality of tax breaks for people who do not need it today and telling our kids and grandchildren that they are going to have to pay off that debt either in higher taxes or in cuts in such programs as education, veterans' needs, affordable housing and many other needs facing the middle class.

But, Mr. Speaker, let me tell you something else. I think that there is more behind this than one would initially think, and I think that there is really an ulterior motivation in driving up this deficit, in driving up the national debt, and I think we heard Mr. Greenspan tell us what it is. If this President drives up the national debt, what we will be hearing in years to come is we cannot afford to retain those government services which protect the middle class, protect the seniors, protect the sick, protect the children, protect low-income people.

□ 1715

In my view, Mr. Speaker, this President is the most extreme, reactionary President in the modern history of this country. And I think that he and his right wing friends want to bring us back to the 19th century, when ordinary people had almost no rights at all. I think behind their driving up the national debt is their desire to cut back and eliminate one program after another which the middle class and working families of this country depend upon.

Greenspan now says, well, let us lower COLA benefits for seniors. Let us raise the retirement age. Ultimately, in my view, and I speak only for myself, I think they want to destroy Social Security completely and privatize it. And then, if they are successful, the day will come where if you are a senior citizen and you do not have a lot of money and you did not invest well, or the stock market goes down, you know what, you do not have anything.

I think they want to privatize Medicare, not just cut back. And if they are successful in doing that, what happens if you are a low-income senior who is quite sick? Do you think there are private insurance companies who are going to provide benefits to you? Why? They cannot make any money out of you.

These people want to eliminate the minimum wage. There are dozens and dozens, if not a majority of Republicans on the floor of the House, and Alan Greenspan, I should add, who not only do not want to raise the minimum wage above \$5.15 an hour; they want to abolish the minimum wage. Their belief is that if an employer can get somebody to work for them for \$2 an hour, government should not be involved.

There are people who want to weaken environmental standards so that our children have to breathe more and more pollution.

Mr. Speaker, let me conclude my remarks by suggesting that if any of the Members here want more information on any of these issues they can find it on my Web site, bernie.house.gov.

TRIBUTE TO ELIZABETH BENSON FORER

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PEARCE). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATSON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. WATSON. Mr. Speaker, I stand to commend a great citizen and a contributing member to the betterment of family life in the greater Los Angeles area. Her name is Elizabeth Benson Forer. She is the chief executive officer and executive director of the Venice Family Clinic.

The Venice Family Clinic is the largest free clinic in the Nation, providing services to 18,500 people in 93 patient visits. Ms. Forer joined the clinic in 1994, and under her leadership, board, staff, and volunteers have doubled the clinic's capacity and capabilities. The budget has gone from \$5 million to \$14 million and additional sites have been added. Sites most recently in place include a teen clinic on the campus of Culver City High School, a primary care facility located at Mar Vista Gardens, and a public housing project, all sites that she founded.

Ms. Forer holds a Master's degree in Social Work and Public Health from Columbia University. Prior to coming to the Venice Family Clinic, she served

for 5 years as executive director of Settlement Health and Medical Services, a nonprofit community health center in east Harlem, New York. She also directed a department at the Metropolitan Hospital in New York City, where her mission was to make the hospital more accessible to local residents.

As Venice Family Clinic's CEO and executive director, she reports to the board of directors, which guides the development of services and fund-raising. She also is responsible for the administration of the clinic's 220-member staff and 1,900 volunteers.

Ms. Forer is currently a board member of the Community Clinic Association of Los Angeles County and the secretary and founding board member of the National Association of Free Clinics. Through these organizations and her direct advocacy work, Ms. Forer is involved at the local, State, and national levels in developing health care legislation and policy initiatives that will help people with low incomes and no health insurance.

Mr. Speaker, I commend Elizabeth Benson Forer for her commendable works and her commitment to families in our greater Los Angeles area.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

Accordingly (at 5 o'clock and 20 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

□ 2005

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. PEARCE) at 8 o'clock and 5 minutes p.m.

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION EXTENSION ACT OF 2004

Mr. YOUNG of Alaska. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, the Committee on Ways and Means, the Committee on Science, and the Committee on Resources be discharged from further consideration of the bill (H.R. 3850) to provide an extension of highway, highway safety, motor carrier safety, transit, and other programs funded out of the Highway Trust Fund pending enactment of a law reauthorizing the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century, and ask for its immediate consideration in the House.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Alaska?

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Speaker, reserving the right to object, I simply observe that there is included in this legislation a 2-month extension of the existing 5-month extension of the surface